

## **Mature-age undergraduate students' perceptions of their learning experiences at university**

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Institutions of higher learning around the world are experiencing an increase in the number of mature-age student enrollment, which presents numerous challenges to these institutions. In Namibia, several interventions have led to an increase in the interest and enrolment of mature-age students seeking to obtain higher education qualifications. To understand these challenges, an investigation was carried out to explore how mature-age students in undergraduate programmes perceive their learning experiences at the University of Namibia (UNAM). The aim was to understand mature-age students' attitudes towards teaching methods and strategies as well as the challenges they face during their studies. The study also looked into factors influencing their learning experience. The data, in the form of text, were analysed through meaning-making which focused on how individuals personally attach meaning to the occurrence.

Using individual interviews and focus group discussions, the study found that mature-age students are motivated to obtain undergraduate qualifications for continuous professional development, cognitive interests and the desire to remedy past educational deficiencies. The findings also show that mature-age students are interested in a practical learning experience. Furthermore, the study revealed five major challenges influencing mature-age students' learning experiences: financial, situational and psychological barriers, technology, time constraints, poor administration and management. It was also determined that UNAM's curriculum is relevant, with course content both up-to-date and understandable. However, the data showed that there is a need for the content to be more related to the African socioeconomic context. The data also suggested that the teaching strategies being used do not meet the learning needs of mature-age students and in addition, learner participation is said to be minimal.

Finally, the data confirmed that student support services such as orientation and registration are carried out smoothly and that mature-age students are happy with the assistance provided by lecturers during consultation hours. Mature-age students make much use of the informal peer support available through mobile applications offered by younger students. Nonetheless, it was found that the older mature-age students experience a sense of isolation and face challenges adjusting to university life.

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